

Memorial meeting pays tribute to Dave Hyland's political struggle

Robert Stevens
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The Socialist Equality Party of Britain held a memorial meeting on January 18 in honour of Dave Hyland, its former national secretary, who died December 8, 2013, aged 66. (See: “David Edward Hyland: March 7, 1947—December 8, 2013”).

The meeting room at the Hilton Hotel in Sheffield was filled to capacity, with an audience that came from the length and breadth of Britain—from the south coast of England to Scotland. Also attending were members of the Socialist Equality Party of the United States, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party—PSG) of Germany, and supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) from France.

The meeting was broadcast to an international audience, with participants listening in from other countries in Europe, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, India and Sri Lanka.

Barbara Slaughter, a member of the Central Committee of the SEP of Britain, chaired the meeting. Speaking “on behalf of all her comrades and friends in the Socialist Equality Party,” she offered “a very warm thank you to Comrade Eileen for attending today’s meeting in honour of her husband, Dave.”

Slaughter said Dave Hyland’s life was “intimately bound up with the struggle to construct the International Committee of the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.” She continued: “Therefore, we will be essentially addressing in this meeting the significance of the political tendency to which Dave devoted the whole of his adult life.”

“Dave’s life was shaped by one colossal political event—the struggle waged by David North, the Workers League and the International Committee of the Fourth International against the political degeneration and betrayal of Trotskyism by the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP),” explained Chris Marsden, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of Britain.

Recollecting the view of Dave he acquired before the struggle against the betrayal of the WRP, Marsden said, “I saw him as the genuine article—someone who had taken up the fight to build a revolutionary leadership in the working class, whatever the personal cost to himself.

“But he was something far more than simply a militant fighter. He was a Trotskyist, and his point of reference, what animated him, was not only the fate of the working class in Britain, but that of the international working class.

“And he never considered himself to be a member of a British party—I later found that many did—but of the International Committee of the Fourth International...

“That is why there was nothing accidental in the fact that Dave responded in 1985 to the political critique formulated by Dave North. He was a convinced Trotskyist and he responded to what he recognised as a genuinely Trotskyist critique of the opportunist course pursued by the WRP.”

Uli Rippert, national secretary of the PSG of Germany, said that in his last discussion with Dave they had spoken of the fact that workers could develop socialist consciousness only through the building of their own revolutionary party, based on Marxism.

“For us this question was decisive,” said Rippert. “We both were factory workers and had had experiences in strikes and struggles. We knew that workers were able during a strike to develop very radical political positions—that they confronted the capitalist state. Even an insurrectionary mood could develop among workers in struggle...

“But even the most radical forms of militancy were kept within the framework of bourgeois consciousness. Socialist understanding, socialist consciousness demanded all-sided international political knowledge and an understanding of very profound historical questions.”

Nick Beams, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of Australia, sent a filmed address to the meeting.

He recalled the role Dave Hyland played in the split with the WRP in 1985, during which they developed a close relationship.

“Trotsky referred on several occasions to the ‘physical power of thought’,” he said. “I witnessed the embodiment of that conception as comrade Dave waged his struggle inside the WRP.

“What gave comrade Dave his great strength in the most difficult of circumstances was the programme of Trotskyism, for which he fought so tenaciously. When that programme becomes the perspective that grips the leadership of the working class, as it gripped him, the proletariat will become a mighty force that no power on earth will be able to stop.”

David North, national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party of the US and chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, had led the political struggle against the WRP’s repudiation of Trotskyism. At Saturday’s meeting, he presented an extensive report on the political significance of that battle and Dave Hyland’s role in it.

Speaking of Hyland’s long struggle against rheumatoid arthritis, North said: “Dave had endured the hardships of his illness without a trace of self-pity. He retained his optimism and his love of life. For many, the experience of protracted illness leads to resignation, intellectual disengagement and emotional withdrawal. But this was not the case with Dave. In November, Dave and I spoke for what we both knew would be the last time. It might appear strange, but the discussion was not at all sombre. Dave remained intensely involved with the world, passionate in his political commitment to the cause of international socialism, and interested in all that was taking place.”

North continued: “Dave told me that he had no regrets about the main course of his life. His decision to join the Trotskyist movement in the early 1970s flowed necessarily from the political conclusions that he drew, as a class-conscious worker, from the great social struggles of that era. He viewed his decision in 1985 to base his opposition to the national opportunism of the Workers Revolutionary Party on the history, principles and program of the International Committee of the Fourth International as the most important of his life. As his life drew to a close, Dave expressed his pride in the development of the *World Socialist Web Site* and confidence in the future of the movement to which he had made such an imperishable contribution.”

Addressing the stand Dave Hyland took in defence of

the ICFI and what was at stake, North quoted from a letter he sent to Hyland on October 9, 2005 to mark the 20th anniversary of the telephone call Hyland placed to the Workers League, the forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party, asking for discussion.

“In profound distinction from various opposition tendencies that had emerged from time to time inside the British organization, you recognized that the struggle against the factional leadership of Healy, Banda and Slaughter could only be conducted under the political discipline of the International Committee and on the basis of the strategic lessons of the Fourth International’s long struggle against Stalinism and the myriad forms of Pabloite revisionism.

“Your firm rejection of the attempt of Banda and Slaughter to denigrate the history of the International Committee with their repugnant and self-serving theory of equal degeneration made it possible to win the best elements within the British section to the banner of internationalism. This contributed to an enormous extent to the decisive victory of the International Committee over all the national opportunist factions of the old Workers Revolutionary Party.”

In the course of the memorial meeting, attendees took the opportunity to view a photo display that paid tribute to Dave Hyland’s life and the critical role he played in support of the ICFI in 1985.

Following the tributes by the speakers, Chris Marsden announced the launch of a £50,000 Development Fund to support the work of the Socialist Equality Party of Britain in the coming year. The appeal won a superb response, with over £9,000 raised in donations and pledges, including well over £1,000 in international donations made online.

The meeting concluded with the singing of the Internationale.



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